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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 003156

SIPDIS

FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

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TAGS: [SCUL](#) [ETRD](#) [UNESCO](#)

SUBJECT: USUNESCO: FRANCE PULLS OUT THE STOPS ON CULTURAL DIVERSITY

11. (C) Classified by Andrew C. Koss, Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Mission to UNESCO in Paris, REASON-1.4D.
12. (C) Summary: France has made it clear that passage of a cultural diversity convention at this fall's UNESCO General Conference is a top foreign policy priority. The push for increased EU participation at the just completed Executive Board is but one part of a broader strategy to get the convention passed no matter what it takes. With the last round of negotiations in February unable to reach agreement on key topics, such as the convention's relationship to other (namely trade) agreements, much hangs on the results of the next round scheduled May 25 to June 4 in Paris. The French badly need for that round to succeed if the convention is to be adopted by the next General Conference in October. End Summary.
13. (U) The May 3 edition of Le Monde carries a short article about President Chirac's remarks to a large cultural meeting in Paris the previous day. Le Monde notes that "without mentioning Hollywood nor speaking about American hegemony, Mr. Chirac warned about the immense danger of uniformity..." The article also quotes Chirac as saying, "France will push with all its weight to ensure that an international convention on cultural diversity is signed at UNESCO this fall." We have seen the complete remarks and they are strong on the need for Europe to stand for the cultural exception and against a free market in "cultural goods."
14. (C) The Mission also interprets the clash during UNESCO's recent Executive Board over the European Union's attempt to expand its participation in the cultural diversity negotiations as one more sign of French determination to push for the convention. It was clear that the French had lobbied member states (especially the Francophonie) hard, and successfully to support their resolution. We were informed by members of other EU delegations that France was so confident of its success that it resisted the consensus resolution and was determined to push for a vote. (Note: UNESCO prides itself on being a consensus organization and seldom relies on votes.)
15. (SBU) At a Group I (WEOG) meeting on April 13, the United States and France both presented candidates for the chairmanship of the General Conference Legal Committee. This is an important position because this committee will need to make the decision to waive UNESCO's rule that stipulates that in order for the General Conference to adopt a convention, it must be ready seven months before the start of the Conference in October. In an unusual secret ballot, a strong majority selected the French candidate. (Comment: clearly most EU countries were unwilling to vote against another EU member, though we do know that the UK, Italy, and the Netherlands supported us. Other support came from Canada, Turkey and Switzerland.)
16. (C) The importance France placed on that vote became clear earlier that week when French Ambassador to UNESCO, Jean Guigenou, made a transparent suggestion to Ambassador Oliver that the US consider seeking positions on other bureaus or as a vice chair of the Executive Board rather than the chair of the General Conference legal committee. After the April 13 Group One meeting, Guigenou told Ambassador Oliver that "we had made a mistake." Note: We understand that Guigenou, a former Ambassador to the UK and one of France's highest ranking diplomats, was personally chosen by Chirac to push the cultural diversity agenda at UNESCO.)
17. (C) Comment: Much UNESCO business is now being looked at through the prism of the cultural diversity negotiations. We interpret the French desire to have the EU take over negotiations on cultural diversity as a way to keep wayward states in line. Our Greek, UK, Czech and Polish counterparts tell us privately that

they are not pleased with the way France is steering the process. Of course, we never do get a straight answer why the EU has to be at the negotiations. The Commission's cultural types are the ones sitting at the table, when the competence the Commission claims is over trade.

18. (C) Comment continued: We are disappointed with the outcome of the vote on the chairmanship of the legal committee. While we still have a seat on the committee, the chairman will be key in setting the agenda for the General Conference and could conceivably push a flawed convention forward for consideration. We also take the strength of support for France as a sign that certain countries do not want to cross France. Portugal, which has been actively seeking US support for a seat on the Executive Board, still chose to vote against our candidate despite our heavy lobbying. We also had hoped to pick up votes among the Nordic countries.

19. (C) Comment continued: We have been at pains not to depict our presence at UNESCO as a battle between French and US influence. Though the tensions have been clear in the cultural diversity negotiations, we have publicly sought to downplay them. Recent events are bringing these tensions into the open. In a sense, UNESCO has been France's playground for many years, and it enjoys huge influence in the organization. We cannot avoid the reality that French influence is enhanced because UNESCO is in Paris where the French can draw on almost unlimited resources, including the frequent appearance of President Chirac to push their agenda. France is also skillfully using the EU and other groups like the Francophonie to thwart US interests. We expect that France will continue to see UNESCO as the "soft underbelly" of the UN system to push an agenda counter to US interests and we will push back firmly. End Comment.

OLIVER